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H I N T S

ON

CHURCH REFORM,

81
ADDRESSED TO

CHURCHMEN AND DISSENTERS.

LONDON:

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HINTS ON CHURCH REFORM.

ON approaching a subject on which so many hold different sentiments, and each, as charity will hope, from a real heartfelt feeling of the truth of his own particular doctrines, from a full conviction that the extension of those particular tenets is necessary for the general good of all, I cannot but feel the difficult, the delicate, aye, even the dangerous ground on which I tread.

History, and the experience of ages, have too well convinced us that no zeal is so strong, no prejudice so deeply engraven in our hearts, as that which has religion for its source. And startling as this fact at first sight may appear to those who differing in parts, yet unite in the fundamental principles of the grand whole of that glorious doctrine, whose chief object seems to be the inculcation of charitable feelings in the dealings of man with man, as they hope for charity from the

God of All, yet a moment's reflection will lead us to the true origin of this otherwise anomaly.

The life of man is threescore and ten years, and what is that to eternity?—a grain of sand in the desert, a drop of water in the boundless ocean. No thinking man (and such only are the disputants) can help feeling that eternity is of more importance than the present hour. And the more we think upon, the more we feel this importance, so much the more tenaciously do we adhere to those doctrines, the preservation of which in purity, we are led to believe will prove our sheet-anchor in the hour of danger and dismay.

But which of all the societies professing themselves Christians, hold the truest opinions, and are most deserving of the name by which they are called, is a question of no small importance, and still the less easily to be resolved, as each, confident in the purity of its own peculiar tenets, naturally claims that pre-eminence to itself.

And this is the main-spring of those religious dissensions which insinuate themselves into the bosoms of families, where all ought to be love and harmony; which excite the jarring tones of discord, which serve to perpetuate the most unkindly and uncharitable feelings, and which thus strike at the very foundation of that faith which all equally profess; and doubtless were it not for these, we should have long ere this learned, by a little candid examination and reflection, to drop minor dif-

ferences which involve no point of faith, and unite in one whole undivided church. And how desirable such a consummation is, all must confess, for it is these dissensions that give the infidel and the scorner such advantage over us. What will they deem of him whose voice is the voice of peace, while in his hand flashes the sword of extermination? What will they deem of him whose lips inculcate the pure principles of charity which his actions disavow?

Oh! as we feel this truth, let us act upon it. Let us come forward candidly, and manfully. Let us say, that at last the time has come, when, by the extension of the blessings of education, men have learned to cast off and trample in the dust those galling fetters which have so long bound down their kindlier and nobler feelings, when, like the slave, as the first sun of freedom rises on him, we can raise our unshackled hands to heaven, and cordially unite in one flock under one Shepherd.

With such feelings as these I would wish to address the members of the Church of England and the dissenters from it—and with such feelings I would entreat them to listen to one whose sole claim to their attention is, that he has nothing but their own welfare at heart.

It becomes my duty now to explain the intention of the following pages, which are, as the title indicates, devoted to a Reform in the Church. This essay will treat solely on the change which is avowedly necessary in the administration of the

temporal affairs of the Church of England. With regard to differences of a spiritual nature, I beg here publicly to request, that in furtherance of that principle of our faith which bids us be in peace and charity with all men, dissenters, of whatever denomination, will address to me as the author of this essay, under cover, to the publisher, a statement of what they consider to be the grievances under which they severally labour, and what remedies they would suggest. And I here pledge myself, as far as in my power lies, methodically to arrange the same, or such of the same as shall appear most worthy of record, which I will then give to the public, with such observations or suggestions as may appear to me to be requisite, leaving it to the general voice of the community at large to decide the question.

Such a publication as this, especially at the present time, would be of incalculable service to the cause of truth; and I heartily hope this proposition may be responded to in the same feeling as that which dictates it.

Though of minor importance, the administration of the temporal affairs of the Church now claims our attention, and we shall see that the principal defects in it arise from pluralism, the consequent non-residence of the beneficed clergy, and the inequality with which the remuneration to the ministry is distributed.

But, firstly, let me premise that the Church of England is so interwoven with the constitution of

the country, that any endeavour to draw a distinction, or effect a separation between it and the state, would be in direct violation of that general compact upon which all constitutions are founded.

Without entering into a disquisition upon the probable origin of our English constitution, we find that it does exist and has existed, time out of mind, in the shape (according to Blackstone, whose words I now quote) of a “ king, the lords spiritual and temporal, and the commons. Parts, of which each is so necessary, that the consent of all three is required to make any new law that shall bind the subject. Whatever is enacted for law by one, or by two only, of the three, is no statute ; and to it no regard is due, unless in matters relating to their own privileges.”

Now, I put it to those who advocate the expulsion of the bishops from the House of Lords : and I defy them to find a means to their end, without absolutely doing away with the constitution itself, and throwing us on the wild waves of anarchy. If it is in their power to do away with a part,—by the same principle they can equally do away with the whole : indeed, the case is yet stronger. As we are bound to the whole, as a whole, any subtraction from it renders it no longer the same to which our allegiance is due. And thus any change in the fundamental principles of our constitution, would leave us at full liberty to fix upon any other system of government which the majority might feel dis-

posed to concur in—an idea which, even in prospective, cannot be viewed without horror.

If, therefore, we feel determined to adhere to that constitution which has stood the test of so many a jarring hour of discord, and which, however in its minutiae it may require looking into, still, as a whole, has gained us the proud post which we now occupy among nations, and preserved to us those liberties, to gain which many of our forefathers have shed their blood, and yielded up their lives; we shall at once see the impropriety of listening to that cry which has unthinkingly been raised to sever the union which exists between the Church and the State.

But this adherence to the general principles of our constitution, by no means blinds, or should blind, us to the necessity of those changes which time and the consequent alteration in manners, habits, and improved intellectual acquirements imperatively render necessary.

And the Church of England has not been free from those errors which must attend every human institution, and which, as in the course of time they come gradually to light, ought as gradually to be amended. As I before said, I shall confine myself here to the alterations that are absolutely and urgently necessary in its temporal guidance; and this, at any rate, does not strike me as so hard a task.

Pluralities must not, in any case, exist. The cure of souls is not a thing to be entrusted to a

hireling. Amiable and excellent as an individual may be, I should not feel that I did my duty to God or man, if I intrusted to him the care of those souls which were committed to my charge. After the most serious consideration, I have come to the conclusion that pluralities must cease to exist, and residence be strictly enforced. And, inasmuch as the labourer is worthy of his hire, and if we sow spiritual things we have a right to reap temporal things, it is incumbent that the resident clergy should receive a due remuneration for their labours. They are set apart to the service of God, and have not the means which other professions possess of providing for themselves or their families. Those, therefore, who profit by their instruction, are in duty bound to provide them with a respectable maintenance. And I think it would prove a great remedy to most of the temporal grievances of the Church, if, with the abolition of pluralities and the enforcement of strict residence, a general sequestration of all sinecures, as canonries and prebendal stalls, should take place immediately on the death or resignation of their respective present possessors.

How delightful, also, would it be to arrange an equitable system for the commutation of tithes, in which the labouring classes ought to be exempt from the payment of them ! How grating it is to a clergyman to take the 15*d.* or 2*s.* 4*d.* a year from his poor parishioners ; and yet he is in duty bound to

exact this to preserve the rights of his successors.

If we lay tithes, taxes, and rates on the poorer classes, we only have to make it up to them in the poor rates, and, at the same time, deprive them of that feeling of independence, the result of honest industry, which ought, in all ranks, to be allowed to grow with our growth, and increase with our years.

The present poor-law system, if it does not enable and compel the farmer to give a higher rate of wages than heretofore, will doubly damnify the state of the English labourer, by turning him on the alternately cold or open hand of private charity, which naturally must work in all forms, pull in all directions, be liable to all impositions, and too often be found egregiously misplaced.

The funds derived from the sources above mentioned, should be appropriated towards the augmentation of the poorer livings, or applied as a retiring pension for those of the clergy who, from extreme age or ill health, should be unable to attend to the duties of their profession. This would do away, in a great measure, with that body of the clergy denominated Curates—a hard-working, and, generally speaking, a most excellent class of men, and most miserably remunerated.

The revenues of the bishops have doubtless been much exaggerated, though there are several episcopal sees where the incomes are on too

princely a scale. Those, then, I would diminish, and would appropriate the surplus thus acquired, firstly, to the increase of some of the poorer bishopricks, and afterwards to the augmentation of small livings. No bishop's income should be less than £5,000 or more than £8,000 a year. And no vicarage or rectory should be less than £300 or more than £1,000 a year. Deaneries are not of such absolute necessity, and I would willingly see the wealth they possess applied to more useful purposes.

I am well aware that the property of the Church is not as yet adequate to any thing like the sums I have here set down. I have marked what I think ought to be the highest scale of remuneration, and which none ought to exceed, as well as what I deem the minimum of pecuniary recompence; and between those they must vary according to the size or population of their respective incumbencies. We ought to recollect also that at present there exists a very heavy drag upon the clergy, in the shape of dilapidations. Every man must have had the case fall under his observation, of a clergyman dying possessed of so little property, that either his executors have been unable to pay, or his successor unwilling to enforce, the payment of the necessary sum for the repairs absolutely requisite. And thus, at his very outset, the latter is encumbered with a load of debt, hard perhaps to pay off, or which so encumbers the living, as to render it, at

least for some years to come, scarcely worth his acceptance. To obviate this, a regular tax should be annually levied on each living, by some proper officer in the diocese, in comparison with the value of the living, and the proceeds should be applied to keep the houses of the clergy in decent repair. This, besides being a real gain to them, would enable the funds of Queen Anne's Bounty greatly to extend their operations among the smaller livings.

We do not want a gaudy and magnificent church, but what we do want is to have an efficient, well-regulated ministry. We do not want one great possessor of thousands, while many a man of equal rank, respectability, and attainments, and probably performing twice the labour, is comparatively destitute.

In saying this, I by no means wish to be understood as alluding to any species of property other than church property. The Church of England is a national church, instituted for the religious instruction of the English nation ; and as members of that nation and that Church, we have a right to insist that the remuneration of our clergy should be more equally apportioned.

The nation stands in the light of a trustee, holding the national church property in trust, for the purposes, and the sole purposes, of the advancement of the national faith.

Was the Church of England instituted for the benefit of the clergy or of the community? And if

(as all must agree) for the benefit of the latter, surely they have a right, if they deem it for their own advantage, so to modify its doctrines, and so to arrange the distribution of its property, as may best serve to promote the end which the nation, when it instituted that church, had in view.

Such a thing as even still is not uncommon, viz. to find one man in the possession of two livings, an archdeaconry, a canonry, and a prebendal stall, is so glaringly incorrect as to need no comment.

We do not want to see men who have entered the service of the Church, and have honourably performed their duties in it year after year, rotting away in obscurity and want, while many a man of far less merit is basking in the sunshine of prosperity.

No! unless to distinguish superior merit, promotion should be, as in other professions, by seniority. Men would then learn to hope that unobtrusive piety would meet its reward—that the poor hard-working curate might look forward to a day of recompence for his labours—and we might confidently anticipate the time when this blot to our Establishment should be wiped away, and a well-remunerated, efficient working ministry be substituted in its place.

As I would never interfere with the rights of any man—as I would leave the present possessors in the full enjoyment, during their lives, of their re-

spective situations, no one would have any reason to complain, save those whose sole object in entering the church was temporal advancement; and for the disappointment of such as these I have no pity.

On entering the church of Christ, a man should feel higher and nobler aims, and should be contented if, in return for his labours, a decent competence were provided for him; and there are none, I am sure, among the wildest radicals, who have a spark of religion in their hearts, who would wish to see the minister of their faith otherwise than in a situation of decent independence.

We must all know from personal observation, that however small his income, every clergyman is expected to contribute, and that not with a stinted hand, to some public and many a private charity, in addition to the constant claims every humane minded man must feel made upon him in a parish of very moderate extent.

“ Ah, little think the gay licentious proud,
 Whom pleasure, power, and affluence surround—
 Ah, little think they while they dance along,
 How many feel this very moment death,
 And all the sad variety of pain.
 * * How many drink the cup
 Of baleful grief, or eat the bitter bread
 Of misery.”

But the resident minister who lives among his flock, hears all their sighs, and witnesses their

sorrows; and how bitterly painful to him it must be to have it not in his power to alleviate any of their distresses; and after all his endeavours, to be assailed (though only by the scum of the earth) as one who, pampered in luxury, fattens on the miseries of his fellow creatures! And this is no exaggerated picture of the hardships a clergyman, not properly remunerated and with no independent fortune, has to contend with.

I now respectfully submit these brief hints on Church Reform to the consideration of all parties. They are intended to be the precursor of a work of a more extended nature, if, as I have before said, members of the different dissenting bodies will come forward and state plainly, without reserve, what are their grievances and what their wishes.

It is generally supposed that the chief wishes of the dissenters, as a body, are to be absolved from the church rates, to be admitted into the Universities, and to be enabled to publish, perform, and register their own marriages. On these three chief topics much might be said; but I would prefer to ascertain the wishes of the different sects of dissenters, to see wherein they severally differ from each other and from us, and by what means, if any, those differences might be softened down or removed,—in my opinion, the grand ultimatum. No doubt, I could collect evidence from the various reports and publications extant on the subject;

but then I might lay myself open to the charge of partiality in selecting or omitting particular passages, which might either tend to obscure or throw a light on the subject. And, on the whole, I think the plan I have proposed, the best adapted for the purpose I have in view.

The physician, before he attempts a cure, must ascertain the state of his patient's health; and in like manner, we must well ascertain what is the general wish of the great body of dissenters, before we attempt to legislate on their political or religious grievances.

It could not be but that a work, such as I have hinted at, would be productive of the greatest practical good. Men would be able to see at a glance, and in their own words, what are the wishes of the dissenting body, and to judge whether the granting or withholding the same would or would not be beneficial, or to the prejudice of the community at large.

Serjeant Spankie, in a letter, published in the Times newspaper, 26th November, says,—“Some complaints of the dissenters may be removed without infringing any great constitutional principles. I regret, infinitely, that any persons affecting to represent the respectable and religious body of the dissenters, should, in their name, but I am sure without their general authority, have declared, that nothing will satisfy them but the entire abolition of the connexion between religion and the

state. But as to their marriages, their registers, and other grievances of a similar nature, what danger can there be in gratifying their wishes? That there should be difficulties opposed by the Universities to the facilities of a common education, to those who have a common country, and, substantially, a common religion, is to me incomprehensible—to many it seems illiberal—and to me it appears strangely impolitic.”

The learned Serjeant’s address contains many wholesome, but, to those to whom chiefly it is addressed, unpalatable truths. However, few medicines are pleasing to the taste; and I have only one observation to make on this passage, and that is, that in speaking thus *generally*, the learned Serjeant must be aware of the stigma he is attaching to the Universities, as if they, on unreasonable and captious grounds, were shutting up the blessings of education, which should be attainable by all, and retaining them as a privilege for the select few. Knowing the high and honourable character, personally and by report, of many of the rulers in both Universities, I cannot attribute the exclusion of the dissenters to such grounds as these. The learned Serjeant argues as if the dissenters consisted only of one sect, whereas they are numerous in the extreme. Is he prepared to grant admission to the Universities to *all sects*, without distinction? or where will he draw his boundary? The learned Serjeant’s high character forbids my designating,

as perhaps otherwise I might be inclined to designate, this, as an ungenerous shifting of the responsibility to other shoulders, or bringing an accusation without being assured of the truth of it. My first wish with regard to the dissenters would be, to try and remove the causes of dissent—at least every reasonable cause;—and this can only be by mutually giving way. I would not so much legislate on the existence of dissent, and the modes of *pacifying* dissenters, as on the *cause* of the existence of that dissent, and the means whereby that cause might be removed. If we strike at the root of evil, we may strike with success; but if at its branches only, will not other and fresher shoots spring forth?

By plainly seeing what are the wishes of our dissenting brethren, we shall be able to ascertain how far either party can mutually give way, which surely is possible where the vital principles are the same.

A house divided against itself shall not stand, nor can a church, when the voice of discontent and dissension is heard within its walls; and while I am determined to uphold, as far as in my humble power lies, the union between church and state, I cannot but feel it a matter of deep regret and reproach, that so many men, from conscientious motives, should feel it their duty to secede from it. And as they can gain nothing but loss, in a temporal point of view, by such secession, I feel bound

to admit the purity of their motives : and though, for my own part, I do not feel bound to secede from it, yet this is a matter of conscience solely between myself and my God, and as such should be mutually respected. And I trust that this consideration will induce parties to put aside, for a time at least, for the purpose of candid investigation, all acrimonious and uncharitable feelings ; to remember that we all unite in the belief of one God and one Saviour, and in the joint hope of a glorious resurrection after death ; and that thus, while our general principles are the same, a little reasoning will teach us that honey and gall do not come from the same hive—that bitter and sweet waters cannot flow from the same well ;—and this will surely lead us to the conclusion, that agreeing, as we do, in the whole, our differences cannot be such, but that the exercise of a little charity will tell us may yet be removed ; and lead us to look forward, with joyful anticipations, to the day when all differences between Christians shall cease,—when the sharp voice of dissension shall be no more heard,—and when all shall unite under the broad banner of one undivided Christian Church.

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